

The Mystery of the Summer House

(Continued from Front Page)

I open then, and put out my hand, expecting to see a flicker of light, or to catch the smell of smoke, but there was neither. The light was extraordinarily clear and peaceful; it was almost as if it were a day.

I went to the room—Aunt Enid, I saw, Ralph's wife—was directly in front of the door and porch; my uncle's, over which was mine, to one side of it. When he called out of his window, "Who's there?" and so on, the figure of a man stepped out of the cover of the porch, which had hidden him from us, into the open moonlight. I recognized him in a moment, even without the big black retriever which accompanied him. It was Livesay, the gamekeeper.

"It's me, sir," I heard the keeper call up, quite unnecessarily.

"Yes, I see that," said my uncle. "What then? What is it you want?"

The man hesitated a moment. Then he said, in a curious hoarse whisper, as if he would like it to reach his master's ear only:

"I want you, sir. Come down quick. For God's sake, come down quick."

My uncle muttered something. I did not hear what, in reply, and drew in his head. I wondered for

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a moment what I should do—whether or not to go back to bed. For all I knew, I might not be wanted. In an affair between my uncle and the keeper a girl might be only in the way. Still, I might possibly be of use—my uncle was accustomed to confer with me a good deal, much more than a man often does with a young girl—and, besides—I suppose I may as well confess it—my curiosity was furiously aroused.

I had lost half a minute or so of time, while thus debating, but I quickly made it up again. I expect a girl has rather an advantage over a man in the speed of throwing on the few clothes essential to decent covering, always excepting any hair-dressing or the like vanity. At any rate, I found myself on the landing outside Uncle Ralph's room just at the moment at which he was coming out.

He did not seem the least surprised to see me—I suppose he was occupied with his own thoughts—in any case, he accepted my presence there as the most natural thing. No doubt he realized that I, too, must have been aroused by the ringing and by the keeper's calling up.

When we got to the hall, after going down the stairs together, we found there Grainger, the butler, fumbling away at the bolts and chain of the door. He seemed to me to take an unconscionable time about undoing them, one by one, and blundering over each, although they must have been perfectly familiar to his hand. He must have done and undone them nightly and daily for many years. But I noticed that he hardly seemed to be looking at them (of course the electric light had been switched fully on), but at my uncle's face all the while.

And then I noticed another singular thing about Grainger's appearance. Uncle was as disheveled as I myself, in his hastily snatched up attire, hastily thrown on, but Grainger was fully dressed, even to his collar and perfect white tie. He could not, surely, have been to bed. And yet I knew it was his usual habit to go to bed early.

After an exasperatingly long grinding and grating of bolts, as it seemed to me, the door was opened, and a flood of moonlight came in. Runyer, the retriever, wagged his tail and sniffed about us.

Still, Livesay did not speak for a moment in any explanation of his extraordinary summons. He glanced uneasily first at me and then at Grainger. He seemed at a loss to begin on what he came to say. At length my uncle said testily, "Well, what is it?"

Even then he delayed. He plucked my uncle by the sleeve, with a familiarity which he would hardly have used in the broad daylight and in ordinary circumstances. He muttered something into my uncle's ear, in that same singular, hoarse whisper as before, only much reduced in volume, as if he was using it at much shorter range. I caught only some scraps of words of it—"a body"—"the Summer-house." My uncle ejaculated dreadfully once or twice, "My God! My God!" Then he began moving away, a few quick steps, with the keeper.

I hardly knew whether I should follow them or not; they paid no attention to me.

"Uncle," I called, moving a step or two after them irresolutely.

He stopped. "Well?" he said, rather impatiently.

"Shall I come? Will you want me? Or"—as a thought suddenly struck me—"hadn't I better tell Aunt Enid you've gone out with Livesay? She's sure to have been awakened."

He stood intent a moment, as if he could not make up his mind how he should answer. I was startled by his face; it looked so haggard and white in the moonlight. All at once he said quickly: "Yes, yes. Do what you like."

Then he turned again and the two men went rapidly away together across the gravelled drive, the big black dog at their heels.

I watched them for a moment and then wheeled about to meet the gray Scottish eyes set deep beneath the overhanging brows in Grainger's rugged, inscrutable face.

He still stood without moving at the door and I believe he looked after my every step as I went up out of the hall to my aunt's room. I knocked at the door. There was no answer. I knocked again, much louder, but still, to my surprise, no answer came. So I turned the door handle and went in. The room was in darkness.

"Aunt Enid," I called, but there was no reply.

My heart began beating furiously. I was far more frightened by this unexpected and uncanny silence than I had been by any of the other strange events of this most strange night. I fumbled for the switch by the door and flooded the room with light.

It was empty.

I could hardly believe my own senses. I looked again at the bed, after searching out with my eyes each corner and crevice of the room. No one lay there. What was more, and more perplexing still, no one had lain in that bed since it was last made, Aunt Enid, who had gone to bed, as she said, before dinner, with a bad headache and feeling miserable, had not lain on her bed at all. She had

gone. What could have happened?

Whatever had happened, it seemed to me that my own course of immediate action, for the first time that night since I had been awakened by the pealing of the bell, was clearly before me. Whatever happened, it seemed to me of the first importance that my uncle should be told that his wife was not there. Doubtless, as I imagined, he had gone out, in response to Livesay's appeal, without thinking or looking into her room. I believed that I knew more or less whether to go in search of him. Among the scraps that I had overheard of Livesay's stage-whispering was that word "the Summer-house." That was the first place, at all events, in which to look for them. Thither I hurried.

CHAPTER II.
The Empty Bed.

I DID not know what, or why, I feared, but I was painfully conscious that my knees were trembling beneath me and that my legs felt extremely shaky as I again went down the stairs under the sinister heads of the rhinoceros, the lions and several antelopes with immense pointed horns which Sir Ralph Carlton, my uncle, had brought home with him from one of his African big-game shooting expeditions. Grainger, to my surprise, was still there at the open door, gazing out into the glorious moonlight night. As I went down I

heard quickly patterring feet behind me, and turned to see Celeste, my aunt's French maid, hurrying down. "Ah, mademoiselle, what is it then?" she asked, as she overtook me on the last step. "That ringing, what did it mean? I was just going to madame to see if she should want my help, when I saw mademoiselle on the stairs. Mademoiselle permits that I ask?"

The woman was panting with the haste both of her running and of her speech, but I noticed that, although she was not, like Grainger, fully dressed, she had at least taken the time to make sure that her negligee was not wholly unbecomingly to her.

Somehow an undefinable suspicion flashed across me that she might know more of the mysterious affair than her hurried questions seemed to show.

"Celeste," I said shortly, "what is the meaning of it? Her ladyship is not in her room?"

"Not in her room, mon Dieu, but, mademoiselle, she will then have run out, like you, like me, like Mr. Grainger"—she pointed to the butler's gaunt figure standing guard-like at the door—"when she heard



"It struck me that there was a carelessness in her manner of response to such little caressing acts of his as I was allowed to see, which did not suggest a return of equal devotion."

that so loud ringing of the bell."

"Celeste," I said, "you do not understand. Her ladyship is not there. I don't know how long it is since she has gone, but her bed has not been slept in." I observed her closely. Either the girl had been thoroughly prepared for what I told her, and acted surprise well, or else her astonishment was genuine.

"But, not there! Not slept in! Mon Dieu, it is impossible! Mademoiselle has made mistake. I go to see." She turned and flew up

the stairs almost more quickly than she had descended.

I did not wait for her return. On the contrary, I was well pleased to be rid of her.

"Did you hear what I said to Celeste, Grainger?" I asked the butler, as I came to him at the door. "Her ladyship is not in her room. Her bed has not been slept in."

"Eh," he said grimly and gravely, in his slow Scottish way, without a change of expression in his rugged face, "that's verra strange, verra strange."

"I must tell Sir Ralph," I said. The man made a movement almost as if he had a thought in his mind of blocking my way through the door, but if such an idea ever was in his mind he thought better of it and drew back to let me pass.

I tried to piece together the puzzle of his strange behavior as I hurried across the moonlit space before the house and dived into the shadow under the shrubby trees. If my position in the family had been other than it was—if I had

(Continued on Next Page)

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Mend them with Mendets. These patented patches are as easily applied as mending your fingers.

Require no heat, solder, cement or rivets—just tighten and the leak is watertight.

Mendets stand extreme heat, last as long as the pan. All one angle. They mend hot-water bags.

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